

Readings

Scripture

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—
² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Ephesians 3:1-6 (English Standard Version)

Reflection

Mystery is a key word for our understanding of the apostle Paul. We need to realize that the English and Greek words do not have the same meaning. In English a "mystery" is something dark, obscure, secret, puzzling. What is "mysterious" is inexplicable, even incomprehensible. The Greek word is different, however. Although still a "secret", it is no longer closely guarded but open. Originally, the Greek word referred to a truth into which someone had been initiated. Indeed it came to be used of the secret teachings of the heathen mystery religions, teachings which were restricted to initiates. But in Christianity there are no esoteric "mysteries" reserved for a spiritual elite. On the contrary, the Christian "mysteries" are truths which, although beyond human discovery, have been revealed by God and so now belong openly to the whole church. More simply, it is a truth hitherto hidden from human knowledge or understanding but now disclosed by the revelation of God.

- John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (p. 116)

In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." And I said, "Who are you, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

- Acts 26:12-18 (English Standard Version)

Sermon Outline

The Mystery Has Been Revealed

Ephesians 3:1-6

The Theology of Tears

Brad Anderson

God has revealed the mystery of his sovereign plan by placing us together in the body of Jesus Christ... (Ephesians 3:1)

How does this mysterious plan take shape in the body of Christ?

As the revelation is made known to each member... (Ephesians 3:2-3)

- It is a message of grace to be received...
 - It is a message of grace to be given...
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As the revelation is made known by the Spirit of God... (Ephesians 3:4-5)

- Hidden from former generations...
 - Now revealed in these last days...
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As the revelation is made known through the gospel... (Ephesians 3:6)

- The gospel makes outsiders fellow heirs...
 - The gospel makes outsiders fellow members of the body...
 - The gospel makes outsiders fellow participants of the promise...
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Reflection Questions (taken in part from the Serendipity Study Bible for Groups)

- What is your favorite mystery novel? How do the characters generally go about solving the mysteries presented in the novel? (If you are not such a fan of mystery novels, think Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson)
- Read the reflection quote by John Stott. How does Stott define mystery? How is that both similar to and different from the way you typically think of a mystery?
- In Ephesians 3:1-6, Paul turns to his own special role in God's sovereign plan for the Gentiles. What is the mystery that Paul identifies? How is his life drawn into God's sovereign purposes? (Read Acts 26:12-18)
- Paul's all-consuming desire was to make Christ known. Why was this so important to him? What consumes your life? What do you observe consuming your neighbor's life?
- What types of people would feel awkward in your church? What can you do to break down those barriers they may feel? Why is it important to do so?